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ABSTRACT

Part of a three-volume series, this guide is intended for parents of children in the first- through sixth-grade, who want to become involved in their children's education and to help their children learn. Discussion focuses on the following topics: (1) helping children to develop self-esteem and self-confidence; (2) helping children develop responsibility; (3) discipline; (4) building positive attitudes toward school and learning; (5) how to help with homework; and (6) what to do when children have problems at school. (RH)

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A guide for parents of children in grades 1 — 6

Maine Department of Educational and Cultural Services

LEARNING IS A FAMILY AFFAIR : A Guide for Parents of Children in Grades 1 - 6

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Learning Is a Family Affiar: A Guide for Parents of Children in Grades 1 - 6 was produced by the Maine Department of Educational and Cultural Services for parents who want to become involved in their children's education. It is designed to help parents understand and encourage their children's growth and development. For more information, contact your local school or the Department of Educational and Cultural Services.

This Guide is part of a three-volume series accompanying seven public service announcements broadcast by Maine's commercial television stations in the fall of 1984. Other volumes in the series are: Learning Is a Family Affair: A Guide for Parents of Students in Grades 7-12 and Learning Is a Family Affair: A Guide for Parents of Young Children. This project was inspired by Deputy Associate Commissioner of Education Caroline Sturtevant, and owes special thanks to her and to Linda McGuire, Charlene Preble, Brud Maxcy, Gloria LaChance, Jim Abbott, and Joseph Pecoraro for their help and encouragement over many months. Most of all, the project owes its success to Charlotte Sawtelle and Cheri Allen, who contributed far more than any of us expected them to.

Nini McManamy
Project Coordinator

INTRODUCTION

As I enjoy very much talking with parents about their children, I was excited and pleased when asked to write this booklet. Here was an opportunity to talk with parents from all parts of our state.

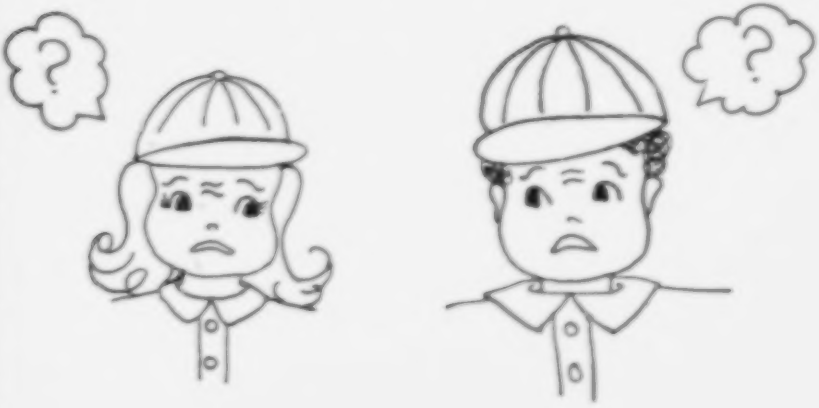
The subjects chosen are the ones about which you, as parents, ask, and the ones which I feel will have the greatest impact on your children's success in school.

If you wish to read further, there is a wealth of information available in the books listed at the end of the text.

Charlotte Sawtelle

I. HELPING CHILDREN TO DEVELOP SELF-ESTEEM AND SELF-CONFIDENCE

Parenting is a very difficult job, perhaps the most difficult in our society. Unless we are very fortunate, however, we receive little or no training for that job. No one would think of handing us hammers and proclaiming us carpenters, yet when we become parents, it is as if society says to us, "You are a parent, now. Do the best you can."



We want to do a good job, and we want the best for our children. What we want is clear. The question is, how can we help our children to feel worthwhile, to be self-confident, productive, and happy? The key is high self-esteem.

Self-esteem

Self-esteem is how people feel about themselves -- how much they like who they are.

Children with high self-esteem enjoy a quiet sense of self-respect, a feeling of self-worth. Impressing others isn't important to them, as they already know they have value. This knowledge influences directly and positively how they live all parts of their lives.

Children with low self-esteem aren't happy with who they are. They feel that they are inadequate and that they have little of value to offer. Everything they are and everything they do is affected by the negative view they have of themselves.

In her book, Your Child's Self-Esteem, Dorothy Corkille Briggs[2] writes, "In fact, self-esteem is the mainspring that slates every child for success or failure as a human being." We cannot over-emphasize the value of self-esteem in our children's lives.

Children need to feel that they are lovable and that they are worthwhile. These needs never go away. We all have them, and they will stay with us for the rest of our lives.

At this point, it would be easy for us to say that everything is fine, as of course we love our children, and of course we think they are worth-while. Unfortunately, it isn't that easy, as there is a big difference between being loved and feeling loved. Many parents are sure they love their children, but somehow their youngsters fail to get the message, even though they are told, perhaps over and over, that they are loved. It may help to know that it isn't so much what we say to our children that influences their feelings about them-selves as it is the way we treat them. Since children value themselves to the degree that they are valued, the way we feel about our children actually builds (or fails to build) self-confidence and a sense of self-worth.

Children use the words, body language, judgment, and attitude of those around them to put together pictures of themselves. Young children think that their parents are all-knowing and all-powerful, so the way their parents treat them must be the way they deserve to be treated.

Does my child have high self-esteem?

How can I tell whether my child's self-esteem is high or low? Are there clues? What should I watch for?

Defenses

Some children use defenses, or cover-ups, for feelings of inadequacy. The following are a few of the more common cover-ups used by children.

- o Habitual tattling - Children pull down other children in order to make themselves look better.
- o Bullying - The children are trying, in ways they view as safe, to be top dog.
- o Chattering - Children using this device talk, almost incessantly, in order to be noticed.
- o Bossing - Children are trying to dominate others.

Mary feels that she is a big disappointment to her parents. Even though she believes their picture of her is accurate, she is not one to give in without a fight. As a first-grader, she is loud, bossy, and just plain obnoxious. Telling her to stop this behavior is as useless as trying to put out a house fire with a squirt gun. Lectures only increase feelings of worthlessness.

The more overbearing Mary becomes, the more rejection she receives. Being excluded by her schoolmates is added to her family's rejection, and her self-esteem drops even lower. Moreover, the vicious cycle doesn't stop there. As her relationships with people worsen, she is less able to concentrate on her school work. Belonging to the gang is more important to Mary -- and to most children -- than are reading and math. How can she concentrate on her addition facts when children all around her are rejecting her?

As the low grades pile up, Mary's list of reasons to feel worthless only grows. Each new failure sets the stage for even more failure.

- o Fighting - These children often pick fights. They probably will get into trouble and may even be hurt, but they will be noticed.

- o Bragging - These youngsters need to impress people. They add to what they are in an effort to get people to think they are important enough to like.

Ordinarily, most youngsters eventually learn that these behaviors bring rejection more often than they bring acceptance. Children who believe secretly that they are inadequate, however, do not make this connection, and they continue in these behaviors. This leads to more rejection, which reinforces their opinion that they are bad, unlovable, and unworthy.

Other children use defenses which are less obvious to others. They suffer in silence.

- o Overeating - Overeating is another unhealthy defense that starts slowly and then snowballs.

Paul is a nine-year-old who senses that he is an outsider in his own family. Certain that he is unacceptable, he becomes anxious and tense. Some of his earliest, happy memories are associated with food and eating -- the praise he received when he ate everything on his plate, the ice cream cones he was given for being a "good" boy at the grocery store. Now, whenever he feels lonely or frustrated, he turns to food. Eating makes him feel better, even if only temporarily. It becomes a symbol for warmth and approval, and he turns to it again and again. Because he overeats, his weight increases. This makes him less attractive and less competent in children's games, and soon he is the butt of playground jokes. As his feelings

of self-worth dip still lower, his need for food becomes even stronger. The fatter he becomes, the more he is teased. Each new rejection leads to more eating. Paul's self-esteem is at a new low, and the cycle is just beginning.

o Becoming a model child - Does this seem hard to believe? How can a model child be suffering from a low self-image?

Erika's acceptance by her parents comes only when she is kind, polite, studious, quiet, thoughtful, and neat. As long as she plays the role of Miss Perfect, she is assured of her place in her parents' affections.

If we were to visit this family at home, we doubtless would be very favorably impressed. We would see a happy, well-adjusted child and loving, accepting parents. The problem, however, is under the surface. Just as we all do, Erika has normal feelings of anger, frustration, anxiety, and jealously. She must keep these feelings hidden, however. If her parents ever see her real self, her bad self, they will stop loving her. (Remember, Erika is convinced that this is true.)

Her every act is designed to win approval and to look perfect. Despite her success at covering up, she has no self-confidence.

Submission and Withdrawal

While some children work out defenses, others, who may be more passive by nature, just plain give up or withdraw. At first, they may try to win the approval of their parents; however, when these mild attempts fail, these youngsters give up. Some grow up believing they don't deserve respect. Others, after being rejected again and again, lose their courage and stop even trying to win approval. Still others are so frustrated by their inability to gain satisfication in the outer world that they turn inward to daydreams and fantasy -- their own, safer world.

Generally, children with the worst behavior are the ones who most need our approval. The more withdrawn or obnoxious they are, the more they are crying out to us for acceptance and love. The youngsters who are the most difficult to get close to are the ones who most need the closeness. What a painful way to spend one's childhood!

Worse still, the cycle doesn't end when childhood ends. Our prisons and mental institutions are full of people who suffer from the effects of low self-esteem.

None of this has to happen. The cycle need never start. Even if it has started, it can be broken.

Helping your child toward high self-esteem

The journey toward high self-esteem starts when children are born and continues for the rest of their lives. There are bumps in the road, of course. No one goes through life with all positive experiences. There are ingredients, however, that

can help to make the positives far outweigh the negatives. Children whose basis for self-confidence and self-respect is strong are equipped to handle the thorns that life offers and still come out on top.

What are some of these ingredients?

o Nurturing Love - This type of love means tender caring. It means that we value children just because they exist. They are dear to us, even if we don't approve of all that they do. Our acceptance of them isn't based on their performance, on their meeting our expectations, on their doing what we want them to do. It's enough that they just are.

If we care about our children in this way, it's vitally important that we show them in ways that leave no doubt in their minds about how much we love them.

Some people feel that physical affection is the key. Hugs and kisses alone, however, are no guarantee that a child will feel loved.

Spending a lot of time with youngsters isn't the whole answer, either. Parents and children can be together all day, every day, with few moments of real closeness. Even special parent-child projects sometimes are marked by criticism and demands.

"Can't you even pound a nail in straight?"
"I said one-half cup, not one-quarter. Don't you ever listen? Now the cake is ruined!"

Material gifts aren't the answer, either. It's easier to give gifts than to give of ourselves. Children figure that out.

If those things aren't enough, what is?

o Direct Involvement - All children need times when our attention is focused only on them. It's as

if we're saying, "I care. Being with you is important to me."

Focused time might be a walk with your child during which you talk over events of the day. One mother and her son talked for just a few minutes each evening before he went to sleep. This sharing time continued right through his teen years and helped to establish a caring, open relationship -- a huge reward for only a few minutes of time each day.

Children know when they have your undivided attention. They also know when it's lacking.

How much focused time do youngsters need? The more, the better, but constant encounter isn't required. Children who receive plenty of quality attention can tolerate times when your thoughts are elsewhere.

There is no faking direct involvement. If you have planned a "together" time with your child, and thoughts about what to have for dinner or about how you're going to pay the oil bill sneak into your mind, your youngster will notice the distance you've put between you. When this distancing occurs, time together is wasted or even harmful. Consistent distancing makes children feel that you don't care.

Youngsters need focused attention most when they are under stress. The death or illness of a parent or grandparent, the arrival of a new baby, a divorce, a move, changes, and disappointments, for example, are more bearable for youngsters if they have extra shots of "I'm-all-here-for-you" time.

Watch your children for signs of pressure. Just a few minutes at a time of your wholehearted

attention can do a lot to take the sting out of a hard day.

Focused attention may be difficult to achieve, especially for long periods of time. If this is hard for you, you might first practice really "tuning in" to your child for short periods of time. Your efforts will be appreciated.

o Trust - The basis of a child's safety is trust. From the time our children are small, we tell them where we are going and when we will return, rather than sneaking out to avoid their tears. Once they're sure that our word is good, that we will return as we've said, the tears subside. They can trust us.

What about the trip to the doctor, the hospital, or the dentist? It might be tempting to say, "It won't hurt," in order to avoid pre-visit fears. It may hurt, however, and if it does, you haven't told your children the truth. How can they believe you next time, and the next? Have you laid the groundwork for trust? Avoid making promises you can't keep.

It might be better to say, "Yes, it may hurt some, but it won't last long, and I'll be with you."

o Honesty - Honesty is the most important ingredient in a nurturing relationship.

Children are very confused when we say one thing, and our unspoken clues say another. It is crucial that we be open with our youngsters.

When Jack comes home from school, his mother is cranky and out of sorts. When he asks her what's wrong, she answers, "Nothing." He knows that something is wrong. Since she won't tell him, he thinks maybe she's crabby because she isn't glad

to see him. What if her problem is one that she'd rather not share with her son? Does she have to tell him everything in order to be open with him? Not at all. She might just say that she's worried about an adult problem that she'd rather not discuss. Now her actions and her words match. Jack isn't confused any more.

Most of us were taught to hide our strong feelings, especially anger. "You stop yelling right now, or I'll send you to your room." "You don't hate your sister. You love her." And what happened when we cried? In most cases, our parents would do almost anything to get us to stop -- except to talk with us about how we were feeling.

Although this is changing, men and boys are supposed to hide disappointment, tenderness, and sorrow, as well as frustration and anger. To do otherwise is to let people see how weak they are.

The truth is, however, that we do have all sorts of feelings, whether we show them or not. It takes strength to be open, to bring feelings into the open and deal with them. If we share our feelings, our children won't have to hide theirs. Some of the unhappiest children come from homes where feelings are kept under lock and key.

o Praise - This is logical. Of course we should praise our children, but using praise isn't as simple as it might appear.

Haim Ginott, in his book, Between Parent and Child, [6], describes praise as having two parts: our words and how our children interpret them. He also distinguishes between helpful praise and harmful praise.

Helpful praise lets our children know that we appreciate their effort, work, achievement, help, consideration, or creation.

Unhelpful praise makes a judgment. It tells children that when they do something praiseworthy, they're "good." Children are quick to reach the conclusion that when they do something that displeases us, they must be "bad."

The following are a few of Dr. Ginott's examples of helpful and unhelpful praise and the inferences children make:

Helpful praise: Thank you for washing the car, it looks new again.

Possible inference: I did a good job. My work is appreciated.

(Unhelpful praise: You are an angel.)

Helpful praise: Thanks for telling me that I overpaid you. I appreciate it very much.

Possible inference: I'm glad I was honest.

(Unhelpful praise: You are such an honest child.)

Helpful praise: Your composition gave me several new ideas.

Possible inference: I can be original.

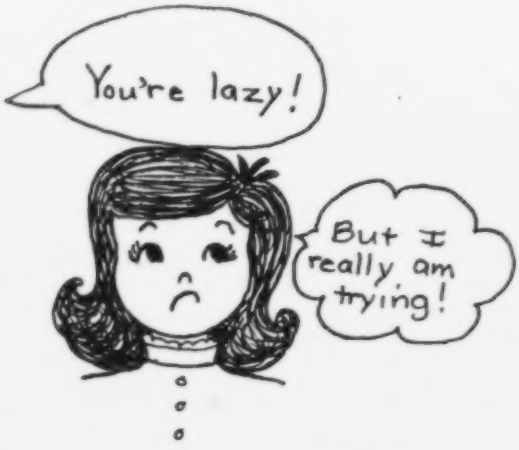
(Unhelpful praise: You write well for your age. Of course, you still have a lot to learn.)

"You're such a good boy," or any praise which judges the person as "good," actually is more harmful than it is esteem-building.

When praise is realistic and non-judgmental, it helps children to develop good opinions of themselves and of the world around them.

o Criticism - Criticism isn't necessarily harmful. When is it constructive, and when is it destructive? Constructive criticism doesn't judge the person. It doesn't cast blame. It simply tells youngsters how we are reacting to their behavior. Destructive criticism makes negative judgments and is threatening.

Perhaps the best way to point out the difference between the two is through examples.



Destructive	Constructive
"You're lazy!"	"I'm worried about your schoolwork."
"You're rude!"	"It hurts Jessie's feelings when she's called names. I don't like to see her hurt."

The comments in the left-hand column tear at a child's esteem. The comments on the right voice reactions to problems, without judging the child's personality.

Name-calling: "You're a slob." "You're selfish." "You're mean." These and other labels have no place in a nurturing adult's vocabulary. These abusive adjectives, and others like them, are not to be used against children.

When they are used, something happens to children. Anger and resentment and hate arise. Youngsters may fantasize about revenge. The result is unhappy children and parents.

Children tend to believe what their parents say about them. If a child is told over and over that he is clumsy, he may come to think of himself as clumsy and to avoid sports and other activities because he is sure he won't succeed. If he is called stupid, he may give up trying in school. "I can't fail if I don't try."

We can send messages to a child without damaging self-esteem. Generally, "you" statements describing a child are judgmental and negative. "I," when followed by what we are feeling, sends a kinder message.

The following are examples of the two types of messages.

"You"	"I"
"You are such a slob!"	"I don't like having to clean up after you."

"What good taste you have."	"I like the shirt you chose."
"You're nothing but a liar."	"I can't count on your words when they don't go along with what you do."

Changing from "You" messages to "I" messages is particularly hard to do, as most of us have been judged throughout our lives. We even judge ourselves!

"I'm so clumsy!" "I can't believe I did that. How can I be so stupid?"

We might benefit from practicing using "I" statements with our youngsters.

"But," you say, "my child will be judged by everyone else." That's right; however, those labels will be more easily shrugged off if the messages from home haven't been judgmental. Your child's self-esteem will be on the rise!

o Empathy - Empathy is true understanding of people. It is almost as if a person moved right inside someone else and knew just how that person felt. The empathic person understands another without judgment.

Total empathy is difficult to achieve, and no one can empathize with another person all the time. When we can, however, it means a great deal to our children. "Mom understands." "Dad understands." It feels good to be understood. It wipes out loneliness.

How can I let my child know that I understand? Watch for signs that show how a child feels. Actions and words are important. Also, you can draw on your own past experiences. You remember how you felt when you didn't make the team, or when your friend couldn't come over, or when you earned an F on a big test.

When we see a disappointed, angry, or unhappy child, we can phrase our statements to show that we understand.

"You seem very disappointed."
"It must really have hurt your feelings."
"You are furious with your teacher right now."
"You must have been very embarrassed."

When feelings are high, understanding can help to defuse them. Many a day has been saved by empathy.

o Encouragement Versus Pressure - It is important that we not base our acceptance of our children on their performance in school or on their ability to play the piano or to play football. This leads to pressure, and the resulting tension can lead to lower achievement than might have occurred without the pressure.

Underachievers come most frequently from homes where there is constant pressure to do more and better. Through their words and actions, the parents are telling their children, "We have little faith in you. You aren't measuring up."

We think of pressure as being applied to older children. Paul P. Mok, in his book Pushbutton Parents and the Schools [8], reminds us that this isn't always the case.

A distraught mother of a six-year-old, first grade boy went to the school psychologist for help. Her child was crying much more often than usual, was having trouble eating and sleeping, was wetting the bed, and was having temper tantrums. She knew the reason. He was under too much pressure. For four months, the father had required that his son study rigorously for one hour every evening. No matter what, the study hour could not vary, even by five minutes. The father's reasoning was, "If the kid doesn't learn to buckle down now, he never will. He might as well learn how rough things are now if he wants to get into a decent college later and make something out of himself." Such a father,

if asked to ease off on the pressure, would accuse the person making the request of pampering children.

Pressure to achieve can lead to a child's giving up. It also can lead to cheating on tests and homework papers -- high grades at any cost. If a child in this situation brings home a 97 on a math test, the first comment made is, "What did you miss?"

Encouragement is different. We rejoice with our children over the 97 points they did earn rather than focus on the three they missed. We listen to them play the new song they just learned and appreciate how they can play the piano with both hands, now. We support them in the activities that are important to them.

David Elkind, author of The Hurried Child [5], has dedicated a whole book to the pressures felt by the children of today. He states that society wants them to grow up too fast, too soon.

o Setting reasonable expectations for our children
  In order that our children will be able to live up to our expectations, we need to make a special effort to keep those expectations reasonable. In order to do this, it is important that we know about what children usually can do at different ages.

The following is a quick review of the stages through which the six to twelve or thirteen year old child travels. A more complete version may be found in Your Child's Self-esteem [2].

Age	Description
6 (about)	- Conscience emerges (right from wrong, consideration, honesty-still shaky; will take years to develop)- During this time, your example is more important than what you say. At this stage, appreciate your child's triumphs.
6 - 12	- Quiet psychological time- Boisterous physical years- Playmates and their opinions become important (continues to mid-adolescence).
6 - 12	- Although agemates are increasingly important, children need their home and parents even more than they did before, as a sanctuary and as models of values and attitudes.
6 - 12	- Mastery of physical and social skills becomes important. We need to nuture their sense of competence during this time.
6 - 12	- The child has to earn a place with the gang. If children at this stage favor adults, they may be having problems in their relationships with their agemates.
6 - 12	- Sameness is important. If they're different, children may not be accepted.

Age	Description
6 - 12	- The worst fate is to be ignored. Even being called names is better than being treated as if one doesn't exist.
6 - 12	- At this stage, children are not tactful or gentle. "Drop dead!" and "You stink!" are common expressions.
6 - 12	- Rules are very important. When playing games, children must follow rules to the letter. If not, they are "cheaters." Postpone lectures on individualism at this point. They just interfere with what your child needs to do.
6 - 12	- Keep out signs, secret clubs
	- Big secrets, diaries
	- Collections - these are symbols for pride of ownership. It is important <u>not</u> to throw them out during spring housecleaning.
6 - 12	- Your children may choose undesirable friends. This may be because they don't feel they deserve to go with "nice" ones, or the friends may act the way your children would like to act but don't dare. It is important to deal with the children's needs at this point rather than just refusing to let them play with these friends. If you can't do it alone, professional help is available.

6 - 12	- Children usually prefer friends of the same sex, but might have secret boyfriends or girlfriends. Romances at this stage seldom go beyond teasing.
8 - 10	- Children choose adult models of the same sex to imitate. If there is no one at home to fulfill this need, try to provide a substitute. A minister, rabbi, priest, or school counselor may help you.
8 - 10	- Heroes such as Superman and Nancy Drew are popular. Children like them because they never lose. Identifying with them nourishes the children's self-esteem.
8 - 10	- Children are tuned in to adults' attitudes toward their roles. If you enjoy your role as a parent, husband, or wife, your children are more likely to enjoy their roles in the future. At this stage, a boy with a harsh father is likely to pattern himself after a man outside the home.
10 - 13	- Youngsters choose an adult model of the same sex from outside the home.
6 - 12	- Children strive to develop academic competence.
6 - 9	- Tall tales are common, expecially among children who are seeking attention.

Generally, you can help six to twelve-year-old children reach their goals by supporting them in their activities, by providing time and room for physical activity, by making their friends welcome in your home, by encouraging them to join constructive groups such as scouts and 4-H, by respecting their privacy, and by avoiding making them feel guilty for cutting the apron strings.

Mrs. Briggs [2] suggests that it may help to ask ourselves the following questions about anything we expect or require of our youngsters:

-Why do I have this expectation?
-Where did it come from?
-What's in it for me?
-Is it based on my needs or my child's?
-What purpose does it serve?
-Does it realistically fit this particular child at his age and with his temperament and background?

If we answer each of these questions honestly, we will set expectations that our children are ready to meet.

It is important for our youngsters to have goals. We can help by encouraging them to strive for goals that are important to them and by accepting them, always, whether or not they live up to our expectations.

If my child's self-esteem is low, can this be changed?

Happily, it can. Children have an amazing capacity to bounce back and to grow.

If you think your children may be suffering from low self-esteem, you can start now by providing them with positive experiences with people and with life; with acceptance even though they are not living up to your expectations; and with success for their efforts.

Parents who shift to providing a nurturing environment often find amazing changes occurring in a fairly short time. It may not always go smoothly, and there may be setbacks, but the change is worth all of the effort that you will put into it.

Don't feel that you have to do this alone. There is help at your child's school or at your church or synagogue. If, for any reason, additional help is required, your child's teacher, guidance counselor, or principal will refer you to someone who can provide it. Again, you are not alone. There are people who can help you.

II. HELPING YOUR CHILD TO DEVELOP RESPONSIBILITY.

Children aren't born being responsible, and they don't automatically become that way at a certain age. Developing responsibility takes many years and requires daily practice.

As parents, we can help to foster responsibility in our children. How? From the time they are very young, we can give them a voice in what happens to them. There are matters affecting our children where we must make choices for them. In many instances, they may make the choices. Let's explore some of these.

Generally, we plan the family meals. Six-year olds can decide whether they want their eggs scrambled or boiled, however.

We parents purposely should come up with situations where children have to make choices. This helps them on their way to becoming responsible.

Young children can't select their entire wardrobes. We have to decide what they need and what our budget will cover. But if we pick out three shirts, our children can select the one they like best.

Helping to care for a pet may help to develop responsibility in children. We cannot, however, expect a young child to be totally responsible for the life of an animal.

An allowance is given to children because they are members of the family. It is not given as a reward for good behavior or as a payment for chores. It is a teaching device that provides experience in the handling of money.

As children grow older, they are given more choices, and more complex ones, and they have an increasing voice in what happens to them. Always, we are in the background, setting up situations for which our youngsters are ready and watching them become more and more responsible.

III. DISCIPLINE

The word discipline means different things to different people. To some, the word discipline means punishment. To others, it means training or teaching. In this booklet, discipline will mean training.

Basically, there are three types of discipline:

The authoritarian approach - In this approach, the authority figure makes the decisions and hands down the rules. Problems occur because children have no voice concerning what happens to them. Many children rebel against this form of discipline. Behavior becomes worse and worse instead of better and better. As these children become older and more resistant to being told what to do, the rebellion worsens. Other children give in and behave because they fear punishment. Still other children learn to lie and sneak to avoid punishment. While the authoritarian approach is sometimes effective in stopping a behavior right now, it generally creates anger and resentment and fails in the long run.

The over-permissive approach - The over-permissive approach gives the authority to the child. Adults sit back and watch. The results usually are disastrous. Children from over-permissive homes generally have a very hard time with the limits set by their schools and by society. Often, they are confused and scared. Children aren't ready to take complete responsibility for their behavior. Who will stop them if they lose control? Worse still, they are not ready to have complete control over adults. The over-permissive approach is even less effective and more harmful than the authoritarian approach.

The democratic approach - This approach takes into account the child's self-esteem. Here, adults and children work together to set limits that are acceptable to all family members. Of course, children can't have a say in every instance. They must go to school, for instance, and they must not smash another child just because they feel like it. In many instances, though, they have a voice, and because they do, they are much less likely to rebel against rules in general. Some parents have a hard time with this approach because it means giving up some of their authority. Generally, however, once they have tried it for a while and have seen that it saves them time and reduces friction within the family, they are sold on it.

Setting Limits

Do we need to set limits? Yes! We live in social groups. Some rules are needed to protect the interests and safety of others. If everyone just paid attention to his or her own needs and whims, we'd be in a real mess.

Most discipline problems are made up of two parts: angry feelings and angry acts.

We should let our children know that they shouldn't feel guilty about their thoughts. It is

their acts that count. We all have unpleasant feelings, but thoughts don't hurt anyone. Only actions hurt people.

o How to set limits - Dr. Ginott[6] writes that limits should be so stated that they tell children clearly

(a) what makes up unacceptable conduct;
(b) what substitute will be accepted.

"Dishes are not for throwing, pillows are for throwing."

Limits must be stated firmly, so that they carry only one message to the child: "This rule is for real. I mean business."

Limits should be stated in a manner that will ward off resentment and save self-esteem. Rules aren't meant to insult children. They are meant to teach them and to keep them and others safe.

Consistency

Once you've made a rule, it should stick. There are times, when a child is under a great deal of stress, that a rule can bend a little. It should be made clear, though, that this is only because of exceptional circumstances.

Consistency is extremely important. If a certain behavior is off-limits today, it's off-limits every day. It can't change just because Mom or Dad is tired and doesn't want to bother to enforce it. Children are confused when limits bounce around. They need consistency.

The same holds true when you deny a request. If your child wants a toy, and you say, "There is no money for toys today," stay with your answer. If your no's mean maybe, or even yes, you are headed for trouble. The same holds true if you say, "Yes," and then don't follow through.

How can you hope to teach your children to be dependable if you aren't?

Leave out the you's when stating limits. Instead of, "You know you can't go to the movies on school nights," say, "No movies on school nights."

Instead of, "You're too young to stay up past nine o'clock," say "It's bedtime."

Instead of, "You've watched enough TV today. Turn off the set," say "Time is up for TV today."

Children heed rules better when they are stated impersonally and with few words.

Lectures are a complete failure. Most children know when they have misbehaved; they don't need a ten-minute speech on the subject. Generally, they just tune you out, anyway. If parents talk too much, they convey weakness.

Even when rules are clear and are seen by children as fair, they are sometimes broken. Then what? We react as a kind but firm adult. We don't get drawn into a battle or a discussion about the rule. We've already seen that a lecture isn't the answer. A child does not need an explanation of

why she must not hit her sister, beyond our saying that "people are not for hurting." When children exceed limits, they need a strong adult ally to help them control their behavior without loss of face.

When children make us angry, we need to keep three things in mind:

(1) Children do make parents angry.
(2) It's okay for us to be angry.
(3) We're entitled to express what we feel provided we don't attack the child's personality or character.

It's better to say, "I'm angry," "I'm very angry," "I'm furious," and to explain why than to lash out at a child in fury and violence. That is unacceptable and has no place in our dealings with children.

If you are so frustrated that you do lash out, you are not alone. Groups, such as Parents Anonymous, are made up of people with the same problem you're having. If there is a chapter in your town or city, they will welcome your call and immediately accept you as part of their group. Just talking with them can make you feel a lot better, and they know how to help.

If there isn't such a group near you, call your child's school. Someone there will help you or at least find someone who can. There is help available.

How to react when a child misbehaves.

Dr. Ginott[6] describes similar scenes with different endings.

Larry, age ten, inadvertently spills a glass of milk.

Mother: "You are old enough to know how to hold a glass! How many times have I told you to be careful!"

Father: "He can't help it -- he is clumsy. He always was and he always will be."

Larry spilled five cents' worth of milk. The cost to his self-confidence is far greater. When things go wrong is not the time to teach an offender about his personality.

When Martin, age eight, accidentally spilled his milk, his mother said calmly, "I see the milk is spilled. Here is another glass of milk, and here is a sponge." Mother handed the milk and the sponge to Martin, who looked up at her in relief and disbelief. He muttered, "Gee, thanks, Mom," and cleaned up the table while his mother helped him. Mother was tempted to say, "Next time be more careful," but when she saw how grateful her son was, she said nothing. End of scene. No fights, no insults, no bad moods for the day!

Lying

First of all, if a child is lying, we should check our method of discipline. Our youngster may be afraid to tell us the truth.

When Johnny's teacher tells us that Johnny failed his math test, we should not ask him.

Dad: "Did you fail your math test?"

Johnny: "No."

Dad: "Are you sure?"

Johnny: "Yes, I'm sure."

Dad: "Well, lying won't help you this time. We talked with your teacher, and we know that you failed."

In short, don't provoke your child into lying to defend himself, and don't intentionally set up opportunities for lying.

If a youngster does lie, we should handle it calmly. We want our child to learn that it is safe to tell us the truth.

Stealing

It isn't uncommon for young children to take something that belongs to someone else. If this happens, it is important to avoid a scene. The child is told calmly and firmly, "The bracelet belongs to Joan. Give it back to her."

"The candy belongs to the store. Put it back." If the child denies having taken the candy, repeat your statement. If the youngster refuses, remove the candy from the pocket, saying, "It belongs to the store. It has to stay here."

If a child steals often and over a long period of time, the problem is serious and should not be ignored. You may need professional help.

Family Councils

Some families set up family councils to deal with everyday problems. Dorothy Corkille Briggs in Your Child's Self-esteem [2], and Loren Gray, in Discipline Without Fear [5] discuss setting up family councils. The methods are similar except that one suggests agreement among all family members, and the other, voting on each issue. Both methods promote family harmony and reduce disciplinary problems.

IV. BUILDING POSITIVE ATTITUDES TOWARD SCHOOL AND LEARNING.

The importance of a child's attitude toward learning cannot be overemphasized.

Children are born curious. By age three or four, they are walking question boxes. By five years of age, most youngsters have formed their basic attitudes toward learning. These attitudes were shaped by their parents' reactions to the children's early explorations. If their touching was met with constant no's; if their parents were too busy to answer the bulk of their questions; and if they were plunked in front of the TV set frequently, probably learning isn't very exciting for them.

Maybe these parents found it easier and faster to do things for their children than to teach them how to do things (tie their shoes, button their coats) for themselves.

When children start school, they have five or six years of teaching behind them. That teaching has a real effect on their enthusiasm for learning. Was it positive or negative?

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What Makes Children Want to Learn?

1. Youngsters need an atmosphere where they can, within limits of safety, look and touch and otherwise explore.

2. They need to be exposed to a wide variety of experiences (not just watching, as on TV, but doing).

3. They need lots of chances to talk with other people.

4. Children need early practice in problem-solving. They need to figure out how to solve problems by themselves, even if it takes longer than it would if we did it for them. As children rely on themselves, they gain self-confidence. Having the ability to learn is not as important as being motivated.

Research shows that children from homes where parents and youngsters talk about school every day actually earn higher scores on achievement tests than do children from homes where this doesn't happen. Your interest in your child's education makes a difference -- a big difference.

We act as role models for our children. If we read a lot and enjoy it, probably they will, too. Interest in learning and growing is contagious. If we have it, the odds are good that they'll catch it.

How Can We Keep the Enthusiasm Going?

We can

1. Show a real interest in our child's schoolwork. A family bulletin board is a terrific place to display a child's work. If space is tight, the refrigerator door works fine.

2. Encourage hobbies, such as crafts, working with tools, gardening, drawing.

3. Look up answers together.

4. Provide musical instruments, if our children show an interest in music. We can even sing, play instruments, or march to music with them!

5. Be selective in our choice of TV programs.

6. Provide materials for making puppets and maybe join in the fun, ourselves!

7. Read to our children, right through grade school and even beyond and encourage them to read to us. As this reading is for pleasure, corrections should be kept to a minimum, and the reading level should be low enough that our children can experience plenty of success. Our youngsters' teachers can be very helpful when it comes to appropriate levels and even specific books that our children will enjoy. The love for reading and the mastery of reading skills are developed only by reading.

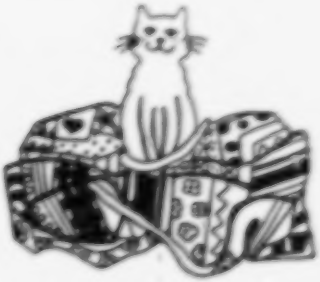
8. Take trips together, everything from a walk to a local park or landmark to a trip to another state or another country. Wherever we go, we'll talk about what we see.

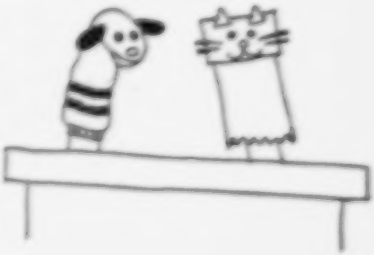
The above are just a few ways to turn a child on to learning. The emphasis in each instance should be on enjoyment.

Enrichment can be fun and inexpensive

Walks are free. Oatmeal boxes and sticks make great sounds. You can march to radio music. Singing together is free, too. Puppets are best when they're made at home from paper bags or old socks. If there is no yard for a garden, your children can plant seeds in tin cans (big ones are best) filled with dirt and set them on a window sill. A quilt

can be sewn using leftover scraps or even pieces of old clothing. The library has lots of books and is free. If your town doesn't have a public library, your children can borrow books from their school library.





An excellent source of ideas for at-home activities is a series of booklets called Parents: A Beacon for Maine's Children. There are booklets for each grade level, kindergarten through grade six, and they are free. Copies may be available through the Chapter I teachers at your child's school. If not, just write to the Department of Educational and Cultural Services, State House Station #23, Augusta, Maine 04333, and ask for a copy.

Encouragement is the magic ingredient. Let it be part of everything you and your children do together.

V. HOW CAN WE HELP WITH HOMEWORK?

Our job is to let our children know, from the first grade on, that their homework is between them and their teacher. We will not become directly involved. If our youngsters fail to complete and pass in assigned work, the consequences are between them and their teacher. We will not be responsible for checking on them to see that their work is

finished or done well. In other words, homework is their responsibility.

If we allow them to, children will let us take over the responsibility for their homework. They have even been known to exploit their parents. Once we take over, we may find ourselves nagging, scolding, and checking over papers. We may find, also, that we never become free of the job.

Once we begin nagging and scolding, we're becoming involved, and we're robbing our children of their responsibility. In essence, we're saying, "I don't think you can do this on your own. You need my help."

However, our indirect help may be useful. We can provide a quiet place for our children to study, with a desk or table, adequate lighting, and reference books, i.e., a dictionary, a thesaurus (upper grades), and perhaps encyclopedias, an atlas or map of the world.

We might help them to figure out a good time for study that won't conflict with supper and needed play time.

Some children like to study where there are people nearby. This is allowable, as long as we can keep interruptions to a minimum.

Basically, our role is to stay in the background, providing encouragement rather than instruction. Occasionally, if our children ask, we may explain a sentence or check over an assignment.

The main purpose of homework is to give children the opportunity to work on their own. This fact, alone, should tell us that our involvement should be very slight.

VI. WHAT IF MY CHILD IS HAVING PROBLEMS AT SCHOOL?

An important first step is to get to know your child's teacher. The best time to do that is early in the school year, before problems even have a chance to begin. Then, if they do crop up, you and the teacher already know each other. That's a big plus.

A lot of parents are nervous about talking with their children's teachers. Often, teachers are just as nervous about talking with parents. One big reason is that often parents and teachers don't get together until after problems come up. Not having met, they aren't sure how to approach each other. Meeting early in the year can solve that problem.

But, let's say that you didn't get together in the fall, and now there is a problem. It might help you to remember that teachers often are parents, too, and even they are sometimes nervous about talking to their children's teachers. Part of what makes it hard is that we really love our children, and we don't want things to go wrong in their lives. Most teachers understand this and want to help you and your children.

Another good thing to think about is that you and your child's teacher can be the best possible team to help that child. You know a lot about your child that a teacher never sees in the classroom. The teacher may be the person who knows the most about how your youngster behaves when he or she is away from you -- how your child reacts to success and to failure, how he or she gets along with other children, your child's strengths and weaknesses. Together, you have a pretty complete picture of your youngster. Sometimes just a sharing session between you and the teacher is the key that solves your child's problem. Sometimes the solution takes more searching. If it does, you and the teacher are the ideal people to begin that search.

Occasionally, when the solution isn't easy to find, or when special services might be needed, the search will lead to what is called a P.E.T. meeting. P.E.T. is short for Pupil Evaluation Team. This team exists for the sole purpose of helping children and protecting them and their parents' rights. The team usually consists of the principal or assistant principal, a learning specialist, a guidance counselor, if your school has one, your child's teacher, and you. Yes, you. If you would feel more comfortable, bring a friend or a relative with you. All of you get together and pool the information that you think might be helpful to your child.

Sometimes, testing is the next step. If that is so, you will know about it. In fact, no test can be given without your written permission. The tests might measure your child's achievement (at what level your child is working right now); aptitude (ability to learn); specific skills, such as math or reading; developmental age (not how old your youngster is according to a birthdate, but his or her behavior age - a big difference in the two ages can cause problems); an evaluation to show emotional growth; or tests that detect vision or hearing problems. Usually, one child won't need all of these tests. At any rate, you will know which ones will be given. None of the tests are at all unpleasant, and some are even fun. Most involve answering questions, writing, solving puzzles, or doing math problems. Pretty ordinary activities, but often they can point out a problem. If you have questions about any of the tests, someone at the school will be happy to answer them for you.

Possibly, the P.E.T. will recommend a special tutor, class, or school for your child. These are designed to fit your child's needs. Once in a while, repeating a grade is recommended. Children

are pretty perceptive. Usually, they know when other youngsters can do the work and they can't. Sometimes, that extra year can give them the opportunity they need to experience success and to mature. It must be a relief not to have to struggle so hard just to fail.

Help is on its way to your child, and your cooperation has played a big part.

The goals of parents and of schools are the same--to provide all children with the opportunity to develop to their fullest potential.

How do I know when my child needs help?

Sometimes children will tell you when they need help, especially if they are in the upper grades. Children often know when they're in trouble. Maybe the work is too hard, or they can't see the board, or they can't hear what the teacher is saying. Possibly, another child is bothering them, either at school or on the bus. Older children usually can figure out what the problem is and tell you. Younger children, even when they know that something is wrong, often aren't aware of exactly what it is or can't put it into words.

When this is true, we must look for changes in behavior. If your youngster often complains of illness when it's time to go to school in the morning (and you check with a doctor who finds nothing wrong) it is very possible that something is amiss. If your child tends to come home in the afternoon with a long face and dragging feet, that also may be a signal to you.

Some children are afraid of their teachers or do not like them. Others feel that their teachers dislike them. As most teachers do like their students, most often the opposite is true. In most cases, a friendly parent-teacher talk alerts the teacher to the problem and leads to a solution.

When children are failing academically over an extended period of time, or when their grades always have been fine, and there's a sudden drop, or when they seem to be trying very hard and still are failing, it's time to check with their teacher.

Parents generally have pretty accurate feelings about when their children are having trouble. If you think that something might be wrong, don't hesitate to call the school to make an appointment to talk with your child's teacher. You have nothing to lose, and your child has everything to gain.

PARTING THOUGHTS

High self-esteem can mean the difference between achievement and failure. It is of the utmost importance to our youngsters. We need to accept our children, love them, and make them feel worthwhile without judging them. We can help to build the base that will allow them to go through school and out into society, confident and ready to succeed.

As parents, we are our children's first and most important teachers. They learn from the examples we set, as well as from what we say. Truly, learning is a family affair.

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